



DeTour Reef Light Preservation Society For the Restoration of the DeTour Reef Lighthouse, St. Mary's Canal

Determination, cooperation, and perseverance among the members of the DeTour Reef Light Preservation Society led to the preservation of one of Michigan's most important lighthouses. The existing DeTour Light, which is offshore at the mouth of the St. Mary's Canal, has guided ship traffic on the St. Marys River between Lake Huron and Lake Superior since 1931. The U. S. Coast Guard declared the lighthouse surplus property in 1997. In 1998, the National Trust for Historic Preservation placed Michigan lighthouses on its list of 11 Most Endangered Historic Places, and a group of residents from nearby Drummond Island and DeTour Village, formed the DeTour Reef Light Preservation Society (DRLPS). The dedicated volunteers acquired donations and grant funding for the project worth over one million dollars.

The first step in the project was to make it possible to get supplies off vessels and up onto the lighthouse deck. In 2001 the DRLPS received a Michigan Lighthouse Assistance Program grant to rebuild one of the two deck cranes. In order to ensure that the deck crane replacement was historically accurate, several salvaged portions of the original crane, including the manufacturer's nameplate, were incorporated into the new one.

With the deck crane in place, the DRLPS was ready to tackle a complete rehabilitation project. With several grants in hand, as well as donated services and financial contributions, the society teamed up with U.P. Engineers and Architects and Mihm Construction to repair and restore every interior and exterior square inch of the structure. Replica window sash were installed; the exterior steel plates were blasted, primed and painted to the original paint color scheme; plaster was patched; new flooring was installed; and new cabinetry was built and installed to perfectly match the original as documented in the original construction drawings.

The society plans to open the lighthouse for tours this summer, adding to the local tourism economy. The restoration of the DeTour Reef Light demonstrates that even Michigan's offshore beacons can and should be preserved.



Historic Preservation in Michigan